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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a diversity sensitivity workshop that changed the climate in a junior college early childhood classroom. The paper then recounts 12 techniques which, inspired by the workshop, an instructor developed for use in a college classroom. The techniques include: (1) chart presentations; (2) community surveys; (3) authentic projects; (4) board games; (5) journals; and (6) process drama. Appended is a draft of an early childhood director survey intended to assess community needs. (Author/HTH)

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"Marcus Did It": A Review of a Diversity Workshop and Other Creative Education Practices for College Classrooms

Jeanne Helm

Abstract

This paper describes a diversity sensitivity workshop that changed the climate in a junior college early childhood classroom. Inspired by the workshop, an instructor developed 12 techniques for use in a college classroom, including: (1) chart presentations, (2) community surveys, (3) authentic projects, (4) board games, (5) journals, and (6) process drama.

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Jeanne Helm

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"Marcus opened our eyes." "Marcus made us uncomfortable." "Marcus stirred it up." Let me explain.

A Diversity Workshop

Marcus, a counselor at our local college, initiated "diversity sensitivity" workshops—open to any discipline at the junior college. I asked Marcus to conduct a workshop with a class of 25 child care students studying a chapter on diversity.

Marcus entered our class one evening. He proceeded to give us the guidelines of a workshop called "Barnga." By participating in "Barnga," students come to realize that all persons have similarities and differences (Blahnik & Brown, 1999). During the workshop, we broke into four groups to play an apparently innocent card game. We were told to "read the rules."

The following hour was a surprise to those who were fortunate enough to be a part of this training in diversity. In the usually quiet and respectful classroom of child care students, there were sudden bursts of laughter, giggles, pouts, and gestures of misunderstandings. Why? Marcus chose an active learning approach to teacher education to spark the classroom's understanding of diversity.

Marcus started the evening controlling the students in an authoritarian manner. " No talking..." "Read the rules..." The game of "spades" sparked dissension and uncomfortable thoughts. The tension mounted as the participants rotated. The leaders and followers were obvious. The need for verbal communication became paramount.

Marcus smiled as he agreed to let us discuss this experience. The anticipated relief resulted when the students could finally release their thoughts in words. Once the students were allowed to talk, there was a mighty exchange of thoughts and revelations. Yes, the rules were different in each group. Yes, the need to communicate verbally is important. *But what if you do not speak the same language? What if you do not come from the same background?* A lively discussion followed.

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As the semester progressed after our experience, Marcus was still with us in spirit. Comments surfaced such as "Marcus is sitting on my shoulder wondering why you said that" and "Marcus wouldn't like that comment" or "What would Marcus do?"

Techniques to Help Students Understand Bias

This spirit led me to try some innovative methods in my classroom to help solve ethical problems in diversity. The following 12 techniques may be helpful in other college classrooms as well:

1. *Chart Presentations:* Groups of three students are required to present a chart (compiled in class) to relate tangible activities to show understanding of family fears, language barriers, and counterbias techniques of special needs.

2. *Community Survey:* The college students are encouraged to interview community child care directors and parents of children in child care to determine the need to communicate the traditions of families in the community (see the appendix). This survey is then included in the "director's forum" (see #5).

3. *Authentic Projects in Classrooms:* Quilts are constructed in the college classroom to show diversity, even at the college level. College students are asked to draw a sign of their culture on a quilt block. These blocks are connected as a group project (see Helm, Huebner, & Long, 2000).

4. *Reports of Authors' Approach to Diversity:* These reports can be interesting and innovative if the requirement includes overheads, Powerpoint slides, and poster presentations.

5. *Director's Forum:* These discussion evenings are a part of my 200-level classes. They are initiated by a survey presented to the local center directors (see #2). Results of this survey are compiled into a list and presented to all participants before the forum begins. The class listens and interacts as the center directors discuss the challenges and tribulations in working with a team of child care workers.

6. *"What Would You Do if..." Cards for Classroom Problem Solving:* These cards are given out in the college classroom using heavy cardboard (4" x 9") with large print—a group of three students can read the short scenario and document comments on paper. I find it effective to construct two cards with the same scenario. This strategy often sparks an interesting dialogue in comparing group decisions.

7. *Board Games:* These board games were constructed in "Project Construct" workshops (St. Louis, Missouri, 1999). We created the board games out of file folders and set them up with the age-old board game concept of moving from the Start spot to the Home spot across the board. There are cards to choose along the way addressing sticky situations in diversity such as...

   A 3-year-old says to a child near him, "You can't sit by me, my daddy says so."

   A child says, "Does your color wash off?"

   (Questions are taken from *Anti-Bias Curriculum* by Louise Derman-Sparks.)

8. *Journals:* I have used this approach every semester in my 200-level classes. Each student receives a folded packet of typing paper. This booklet then becomes a dialogue between the individual student and the instructor. This confidential material is a valuable asset to a student's emotional stability.

9. *Debates to Dialogue (verbal exchange):* A dialogue between two students can lead to a discussion or a debate if you divide the physical classroom into two or three sections. Each section gets equal time to present its side of the story. The verbal exchange can be assertive, passionate, but respectful.

10. *Process Drama* (Crumpler, 2000): This informal drama presents opportunities for students to

interact in scenarios. This role playing invites students to be creative in solving problems. Crumpler suggests that students write their own scenario reflecting the problems occurring in the classroom. In providing "scaffolding," the college instructor will actually become involved in the role play. I tried this technique recently in a college classroom. A student and I reenacted a situation that had previously occurred in her center. We opened the classroom up to discussion after our initial presentation.

11. *Comments on an Easel:* As students take their break in college classrooms, they are welcome to add a comment or question to the *comment easel*. This individual response through writing is inviting to the quiet, intrapersonal learner. This technique was introduced to me through "Project Construct" workshops in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1997. Students have written comments such as:

    "You left my group out today." Or
    "Explain cultural pluralism."

    (These statements open up concerns and discussion from many of the students.)

12. *Are We Similar?:* Students are grouped in "twos," and markers, scissors, glue, paper, and clay are handed out. The students brainstorm to discover all the similar events in their lives. Each group of two then invents a cooperative product displaying these similarities. These products are then discussed.

Suggested Reading

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Lowman, J. (1995). *Mastering the techniques of teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (ERIC Document No. ED387051)

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Crumpler, T. (2000). Drama as a strategy for engagement and change in literacy learning. *College of Education News, 7*(2), 6.

Derman-Sparks, L. (1989). *Anti-bias curriculum*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. (ERIC Document No. ED305135)

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Appendix

Director Survey Draft

Please complete this survey. The CCE 210 class at RCC will be compiling the results of this survey to make decisions as to what families are needing this community. We will share the results with you.

For-profit center _____ Not-for-profit center _____
# of enrolled children _____

Infant/Toddler Room #_____infants enrolled
#_____toddlers enrolled

1. Most parents ask for guidance in infant care (suggestions for home life).
   Y N Sometimes
2. Parents want teachers to spend more time with their child.
   Y N Sometimes
3. Parents need more time with teachers for information.
   Y N Sometimes
4. Most parents have a different discipline approach to the "biter" than you do.
   Y N Sometimes
5. Parents want teachers to discipline their child as they do.
   Y N Sometimes

Preschoolers #_____preschoolers (ages 2-5)

1. Most families appear too busy to get involved with your activities.
   Y N Sometimes
2. Families need guidance and **ask** for help. _____% of families
   Y N Sometimes
3. Families need guidance and **do not ask** for help. _____% of families
   Y N Sometimes
4. Families attend parent meetings and get-togethers. _____% of families
   Y N Sometimes
5. Most parents request information on child's well-being on **daily** basis.
   Y N Sometimes
6. Most parents offer suggestions and help in holiday celebration.
   Y N Sometimes
7. Parents require religious restrictions—holidays are not allowed. #_____of parents
   Example
8. Most parents request that their family traditions be accepted.
   Y N Sometimes

Family traditions/customs accepted in your center:

1. holiday Y N Sometimes
   Example_____
2. food Y N Sometimes
   Example_____
3. religion Y N Sometimes
   Example_____
4. dress Y N Sometimes
   Example_____
5. health Y N Sometimes
   Example_____

I find parents in our center to be concerned about

_____

_____

I notice that _____parents want to
most few some
be involved with our center activities.

My suggestions for family connection:

I would be willing to sit in a "Director's Forum" December 5, 2000 at 7:00 p.m. in W215 to discuss parents and their connection with child care centers/preschools.

Signature _____
Phone _____

For questions, call Jean Helm at 000-00000 ext. 000; email:
Address:

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